1:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

13. ACQUIRING WITCHCRAFT FROM FRIENDS

Bwilile (elderly pagan man).

'We have heard it said that sometimes, when a woman plays with a friend's child who is growing up a little, she may give it something in food, or offer it something to taste, which causes the child who has eaten it to become a witch. Hence people say: "A stranger gave him (or her) witchcraft; there is none in our family (*ikikolo*)."

'Some make children climb up the walls or hut pole when they wish to give them witchcraft, hence when a child slides down it is said, "He (or she) is pure; he has no trace of witchcraft in his stomach." If he has any in his stomach, then he clings to the walls or pole, and it is said, "He is giving him mystical power (*amanga*)", meaning the witch is giving him the cunning of witchcraft that he also may be "clever". If there is a girl at home who is cunning, her friends shun her. They admonish her, saying: "Don't do those things. It's forbidden at a husband's place. You will always be driven out." She gives her friends things saying: "You eat that, and you that." And boys do likewise. We knew the custom of old. When boys are out herding cattle one friend tells another to dig up a certain plant, saying it will give him cunning. Hence it is said that a cunning boy wants to make his friends cunning also. When girls are secluded at puberty they always play with younger girls, and if one makes another climb the hut pole or wall the mothers are very angry, saying: "No! That's forbidden. Don't do (bad) things to others. It seems as if you were cunning."'

Commenting on this text, Mwaisumo said: 'The witches learn to enter a house by climbing up the wall, instead of going through the door, so that people don't see them come in. If a child has *no* witchcraft in its stomach at all, no one can give it witchcraft, but if the blood of the mother is dirty with witchcraft it becomes a witch.'

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3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
FN17 Ngonde FN17

CHAPTER XXV

The Brave Days of Old

LIKE the Romans and Greeks, and like many peoples at an elementary stage of civilization, the Konde place their great days in the past. It is, perhaps, a little strange that this should be so; for there can be no doubt that the presence of the white man has stirred the African everywhere to the thought of a new day for his race. But they are at the same time conscious that great things were done in the past, and among the demands made upon me by natives whom I have consulted, and who have helped me with this book, there is none more insistent than that I should include the portentous happenings of an older day.

Old and middle-aged men speak gleefully of the days of their youth; of the great deeds they did when they were boys; how they trapped more skilfully, caught bigger fish, ran faster, leaped higher than the young men of to-day. And the deterioration, they assert very emphatically, is due to the presence of the white man. Not that the latter discourages sport; on the contrary he spurs it on; but in his own way, and that is not the Konde way. The white man's way is to give prizes to the winner; the Konde

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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way is to give the lash to the duffers; and they claim that theirs is the more effective method of bringing all up to a high standard. But thrash the ninny to-day, and he is off to the Administrative Officer to lodge his complaint, which the latter must inquire into. And hence much deterioration.

But these are not the facts of which they wish a permanent record to be made. There are other things; things which the pagan native profoundly believes, and which Christians also believe and take pride in, though they think that the missionary will object to their holding what he probably calls silly ideas. These stories include most of the typical tales of olden times: the hero-warrior, the defier of tyrants, the mighty medicine man, the great prophet, the man who has obtained lordship over Nature in some form, and the man who controls the spirits. All these, and many more, are included among the Konde tales, and I do not place them among folk tales, for the people regard them quite differently. A folk tale is to-day, whatever it may have been in the past, either a mere diversion to pass away an idle moment, or a moral for children, or a warning for adolescents. The tales which I am thinking of are, in the native mind, records of facts, facts which they believe to be no longer achievable, but indubitably fact in the past; and no study of the native mind can be complete which does not take this into account.

I. The hero-warrior. Chungu, in his early wanderings in search of a home, came near the hil Mphande, the seat of the Simbove rulers of that day.

8:Wilson E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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boys tell all sorts of stories, especially about women, they discuss love-making and women, and tell tales of their own conquests. The younger ones listen to these things and that is all right in the boys' village, that is how we learn. But we compare in our minds and think that if a boy stays at home it is as if he listened to all this from his parents, and people always do talk lewdly at night ; and that is very bad, that is foolishness.— But in the boys' village it is good for the young ones to listen, that is how children grow up."

On another occasion when I told this same man that in Europe many people thought it a good thing for boys to get sexual instruction from their parents and teachers he was shocked : " But I think it is impossible " he protested " for parents to go into detail with their children ; there is too much shame on both sides. And if they did, it would damage the children's respect for them."

There is thus a correlation in this society between the age-village system at its genesis and the belief that a boy's dawning interest in sex must be informed, not by his parents, but by friends only a little older than himself.

Few men marry before twenty-five years of age, but affairs with girls begin before puberty. All affairs are related in detail to friends in the age-village, and the younger ones learn by listening ; and they also learn when the older boys send them as messengers to the girls of their fancy.

Besides the more serious love affairs which are carried on in secret, groups of boys from the same age-village commonly flirt with any girls they meet on the way, and it is then that the incest taboos are learnt. If one of the boys is known to be related to one of the girls, either through a common grandfather or great-grandfather, his companions send him away : " Don't you see your sister is here ? You cannot come ! "

Contrary to a general belief about " primitive " societies, homosexual intercourse is common in the boys' villages, between close friends, but there is no real perversion ; homosexuality is said to be always *faute de mieux*. The older men in discussion dismiss it with the tolerant word " adolescence," it is never continued after marriage, and all except the feeble-minded get married sooner or later.

But life in a boys' village also gives its members much information and wisdom unconnected with sex. There, as we have seen, boys perfect their skill in building, and there also they learn to argue and express themselves with adult fluency. It is characteristic of the Nyakyusa legal

8: Wilson E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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621 system that small cases between neighbours are always first discussed and
868 often finally settled in the presence of some friend or friends who act as
867 arbitrators, without recourse to the constituted political authorities. Small disputes about petty theft, the possession of a cloth or some coppers, the ownership of a banana stem and so on, are as frequent in the boys' village as elsewhere, and as elsewhere the people concerned often argue it out to a finish before some friend or neighbour. And by listening to such disputes, or participating in them either as judge or principal, the boys acquire rhetorical skill and some knowledge of law. In some boys' villages there is a recognized leader appointed by the political authorities of the chiefdom to settle graver disputes, in others there is not. The position of such a leader, where there is one, will be discussed later.

577 Above all the boys' village gives to its members the conversation and
621 company of more of their own contemporaries than did the group of herd boys, and company the Nyakyusa hold to be the greatest of educators. In the most explicit discourse I heard on the value of company my informant explained that cleanliness, together with rhetorical and conversational skill, were all learned in company. These are his exact words: "We say that it is by conversing with our friends that we gain wisdom; it is bad to sit quite silent always in men's company. A man who does this seems to us a fool, he learns no wisdom, he has only his own thoughts. And a man who does not spend time with other people is always dirty, he does not compare himself with any friend. We say that we learn cleanliness of body in company, the dirty ones learn from their more cleanly friends. Again if a man is accused to the chief and is unable to defend himself easily and with eloquence we mock at him and say: 'What is the matter with you? Do you live all by yourself? How is it that you are so foolish?' We think that wisdom and cleanliness are the two great things learnt in company. We think it is bad to live alone far from other people, such a man learns nothing; he never learns to express himself well, to converse pleasantly with friends or to argue a case with eloquence. It is better to live with other people."

621 At first the sons of the parent village continue to join the boys'
561 village as they grow up; but after some years, when the senior members of the boys' village are about seventeen or eighteen years old, the younger ones begin to be refused admittance to the village: "they are children." The young ones then either begin a new age-village of their own, or else join a village which has already been started by the sons of a nearby men's village a little junior to that of their own fathers. If you enquire who are the members of such and such a boys' village you are always told that they are the sons of a particular village of men, but detailed investiga-

13: Lehmann E-5 (1939)1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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I went to the place and got permission to enter the hut in which the first part of the ceremony took place. I found there the parents of the girl, the girl sitting enveloped in clothes in one corner of the hut, and some older females, one of whom was the acting *unnyago*. Some male guests were also present[20]. As the girl had had her first catamenia the present ceremony marked at the same time the end of her preparation for marriage.

The *unnyago* prepared a beverage of beer in which a light-brown medical powder *(imbondanya)* was put. First the girl had to drink from it, then the parents followed. This beverage was believed to strengthen *(ubusisya)* the consumers. Then a spear was handed to the girl by her father, and the girl handed it in turn to some relatives of the bridegroom waiting near the hut. These persons had to bring the spear to the girl's bridegroom as a sign that he could now marry the girl[21], but not before he had brought a bull to the girl's father. After this the girl, now sitting in the middle of the hut, was given small gifts from the participants in the ceremony.

Practical instruction of premature girls in house-hold matters.

Following this the whole body of the girl was anointed before the door of the hut. The *unnyago* began by anointing her legs; then the girl herself continued it. The ointment was prepared from castor oil and a powder of red wood *(Kipimba*, found commonly in the environment of Lake Rukwa). At this moment a male participant in the ceremony chanced to, come out of the hut, and suddenly a young woman

[20] Cf. Wilson, Introduction, p. 238; The Study of African Society, p. 11 (The Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 2, 1939).

[21] *ukwepa*: to take (also as regards marrying); *ubwepia*: nuptials.

13:Lehmann E-5 (1939) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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sitting there on the yard got up, as quickly as possible held her hands before her eyes and rushed off. This was because this man was her father-in-law. The strict social taboo in such circumstances is well known[1].

The next act consisted in shaving the girl's hair on her temples by the *wanyago*; the father was shaved by a younger brother of his in the same manner. (I cannot remember whether it was also the case with the mother of the girl.)

The old fashioned hut of the chief's wife.

Then the further ceremony took place again inside the hut. All the participants sat down on mats, and the *wanyago* accepted the complaints of the parents on the former conduct of their daughter. Sometimes the discussion between these parties, where the *wanyago* played the role of a mediator as in the case with the *wajobi* (or speaker) in the court, reached such a pitch of excitement that I thought a serious quarrel had broken out. The excitement was, perhaps, only of a ceremonial character; I was told, however, that in former times corporeal punishment has been inflicted, if, indeed, the girl had shown misconduct in the times before.

Next, the girl was instructed by the *wanyago* in her duties as a wife. These instructions were of a theoretical or moral nature concerning the correct conduct of the girl towards her parents also after the ceremony and towards her future husband. The practical part of the initiation instructions sometimes comes before this ceremony at the end of initiation. These practical instructions cover the preparing of food

[1] Cf. Merensky, p. 122; Mariyazia, p. 108 (at Karonga?). According to Merensky the daughter-in-law has to observe this taboo also towards the brothers of her father-in-law. All these persons are named *ukamwana*.

13:Lehmann E-9 (1939)1951 F?G? Nguonde F?G?
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and other duties applicable to a girl after marriage. The practical instruction takes place in or before a special hut in the village under the leadership of the *chesyago* (*sesyagogi*). The girl is admonished by the *sesyago* to obey her parents without any delay, to perform the commands of her mother immediately, e. g. to clean the hut, and especially to show obedience when guests are present. Should the mother blame her daughter unjustly, she should not reply. (The girl had been blamed in the earlier discussion that she had not swept the hut when her mother required her to do it). Then her duties and conduct towards her future husband were inculcated. As a wife she must never accept anything from the hands of her husband without kneeling and stretching out both hands, and turning away her face with eyes cast down. Also as a wife she must not hold her head up

Some of the drummers.

when she is addressed by a man. As a wife she must be anxious to prepare her husband's meal always at the right time, that means, it has to be ready when her husband returns from the field. If she sees her husband coming from the field, then she has to go to meet him, and take his hatchet from him. Should her husband scold her, she is not to reply; but she may ask her neighbours for help. It is one of her duties to take care of the regular cleaning of the hut[1]. The ashes must always be removed by her from the fireplace. If there are only a few ashes on the fireplace she must remove them with her hands[2].

[1] The place near the house where the sweepings are thrown down is called *nyungubilo*.

[2] Cf. *Markmann*, p. 51, who refers to such moral instructions connected with puberty customs, probably at *Kasenga*; cf. *Fülleborn*, p. 330 (*Nygonde* plate).